

AMES, Iowa (AP) —

Iowa's three public universities could save tens of millions of dollars in the coming years and eliminate up to 250 jobs by dramatically restructuring their administration, according to a consultant's report released Thursday.

Deloitte Consulting LLP's recommendations include changing or eliminating many individual departments' human resources, information technology and finance positions. Instead, many of their functions would be handled at a college or university-wide level by more centralized teams.

The jobs would be cut over two years through attrition and offering phased retirement to some employees, the consultant says in its 138-page report, which repeatedly cautions that the job-cut and savings figures were rough estimates and would be affected by how the universities implement any changes. The report also says the schools can cut technology costs by requiring some workers to use network printers and virtual desktops rather than having their own printers and computers.

The Iowa Board of Regents discussed the proposals at Iowa State University in Ames on Thursday, but wasn't expected to vote on them. Instead, they plan to gather feedback next week at town hall meetings on the university campuses before potentially taking action on the plans next month.

"This is a long-term transformation," Regent Larry McKibben said. "It's a transformation that we hope is something that really leads to even better efficiency and lower costs for the students."

Virginia Fraser, who is managing the initiative for Deloitte, told the regents that the staffing changes would be sensitive and up to the board to decide at a later date. Phased retirement typically involves offering long-term employees the option of reducing their work and pay but keeping their health benefits for one to five years.

The board, which governs the three universities, hired Deloitte to look for ways to cut costs and improve services in administration and academic programs. The board has already voted to proceed with major changes to how the schools buy goods and services. Changes to academic programs are expected to be developed in the coming months, after the board hires another consultant to help with that work.

Deloitte says the schools could see major savings by cutting dozens of employees who handle functions such as desktop support, accounting and payroll and benefits. For example, it says up to 35 University of Iowa information technology jobs could be cut, which would be 12 percent of the department's staff.